

## **Vermont Prescription Monitoring System (VPMS) Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System?**

Act 205, passed in 2006, authorizes the Department of Health to establish the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System (VPMS). When a Schedule II, III, or IV controlled substance is dispensed to an outpatient, the VPMS will collect a standard set of information on the patient, the prescriber, and the drug, and hold that information in a central database for six years. The system began operating on January 12, 2009.

### **2. What is a Controlled Substance?**

A Controlled Substance is a drug or chemical that is regulated by the U.S. government's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

### **3. Which drugs does the system monitor?**

The law authorizes the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) to create a prescription monitoring program for Controlled Substances on Schedules II, III, and IV.

Examples of Schedule II substances include morphine, phencyclidine (PCP), cocaine, methadone, and methamphetamine.

Anabolic steroids, codeine and hydrocodone with aspirin or Tylenol<sup>®</sup>, and some barbiturates are examples of Schedule III substances.

Examples of drugs included in schedule IV are Darvon<sup>®</sup>, Talwin<sup>®</sup>, Equanil<sup>®</sup>, Valium<sup>®</sup>, and Xanax<sup>®</sup>.

### **4. Who is required to submit data to the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System?**

Any pharmacy licensed by the Vermont Board of Pharmacy is required to submit a report of all reportable prescriptions dispensed to a patient in Vermont.

### **5. What information will be submitted to the VPMS database?**

Pharmacies and other dispensers will report information on prescriptions of Controlled Substances II-IV to the VPMS, including the patient names, the name and quantity of the drug dispensed, the date of dispensing, and the name of the prescriber or dispenser.

## **6. Who will have access to the VPMS database?**

Access to information in the database will be limited to those authorized by the law as described below:

A health care provider or dispenser (pharmacist) with a current Vermont license, DEA number and who has registered with the VPMS may access the VPMS database to receive information relating to a bona fide current patient. Providers who register can access information electronically from the database. (Providers are not required to register with the VPMS to use the system, although we strongly encourage them to register to obtain access to the patient data).

- Licensing Boards do not have direct access to the VPMS database. A representative of a professional board that is responsible for the licensure, regulation or discipline of health care providers or dispensers, may request information from the VPMS database relating to a licensee pursuant to a bona fide specific investigation of that licensee.
- Patients can request a report of their own records; however, they do not have direct access to the system. A patient for whom a prescription for a controlled substance is written may request information from the VPMS database relating to himself or herself. The request for this information must be in writing, and the person must appear personally to receive the VPMS report. To receive the report, the patient must produce a valid government-issued photographic proof of identify to obtain the information.

## **7. What are the Benefits of the VPMS?**

- Information from the VPMS will be available to providers and pharmacists to help in their work to effectively manage their patients' treatment.
- The system will assist doctors by providing them with a record of prescriptions previously received by the patient so that the physician can appropriately treat the patient.
- Information can help identify patients who can benefit from early assessment, treatment, and rehabilitation for drug abuse and addiction.
- The department may also use de-identified information from the VPMS to monitor trends and address prescribing problems on a state or regional basis.

## **8. How does the VPMS ensure that the data is kept confidential?**

The Vermont Prescription Monitoring System provides many safeguards to protect patient confidentiality and access to controlled substance prescription information.

- Records are protected by both federal (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act known as HIPAA) and state law (the state statute and rules that govern the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System (VPMS)). The state law requires doctors and pharmacists to certify that any request for information from the system is for the purpose of providing medical or pharmaceutical treatment to a bona fide current patient. If a doctor or pharmacist intentionally fails to comply with the law he or she would be subject to discipline from their licensing board, and civil or criminal enforcement that could bring up to one year in jail and a \$1000 fine.
- Direct access to the database is limited to pre-registered doctors and pharmacists. All other database queries are handled by VPMS staff. This staff is restricted and carefully instructed on confidentiality.

## **9. How accurate is the data?**

The VPMS will always be secondary information and is primarily a tool to assist physicians. A number of data checks and data matching and deduplication functions are used to maximize the accuracy of the VPMS data.